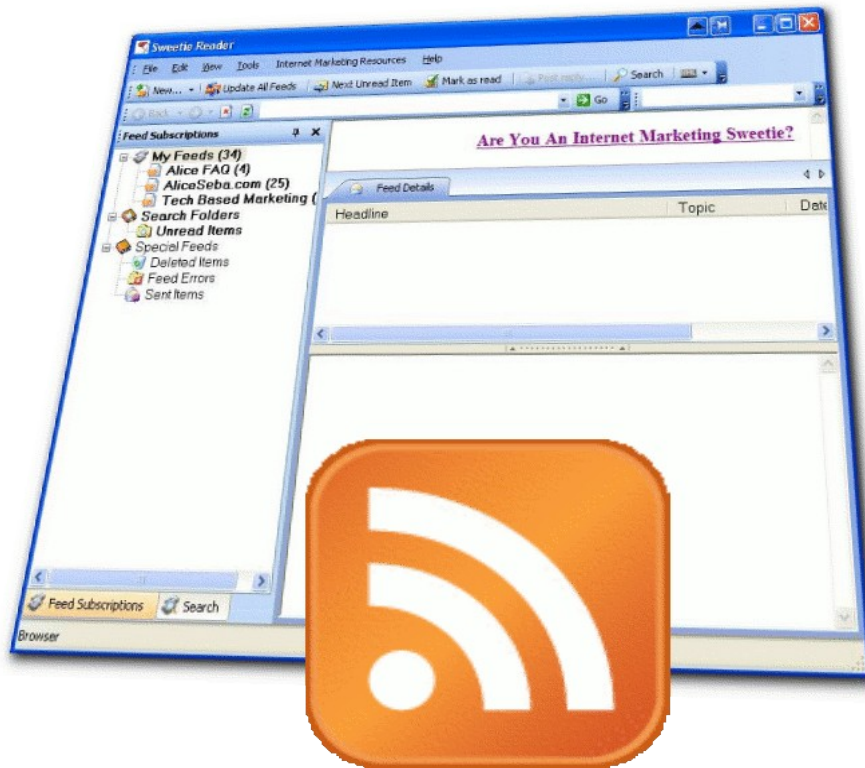

RSS BASICS

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3rd Edition

Pass It On!


Know someone who can use this information? Feel free to share it. We only ask you do so in it's original, unchanged form.



What Is RSS?

Simply put, RSS is a method of delivering content. An RSS feed is just a text file with content in it, much like an HTML file. But here's where the biggest difference comes in. An HTML File requires a browser to open and view it, but an RSS feed is formatted in a way that a lot of applications can read, extract, reassemble or assimilate it. So, your content is not limited to one method of consumption.

Some people refer to RSS, XML and ATOM interchangeably. These are just technicalities and for the general purpose you and I are using it for, they do the same thing; so don't worry about that when you're starting out.

When surfing the Internet, I'm sure you've come across many tiny orange images marked RSS or XML. When a website carries this image  (sometimes called chicklets), that means they publish an RSS feed of their latest content.

Before we go further, let's familiarize ourselves with a common term related to RSS and that is 'FEED' as I've briefly used above. This is because RSS is a push technology meaning you 'feed' it to people or it is 'fed' to websites so they can re-publish it.

What It Is Commonly Used For

RSS is mostly associated with blogs, although it can be used for any website, and almost any content. It was built mainly to distribute time sensitive content like news and blogs; many people use it to scan the headlines. But that is not all you can do. With a little dash of creativity, you can distribute almost anything you can think of because you can also append audio (podcast), video, PDF's, executable files, just about any file. For now, let's get back to basic regular RSS.

How RSS Is Consumed

RSS is largely consumed using two main methods. First, it is read using an RSS aggregator. Many people call this an RSS Reader or Feed Reader but for the purpose of this course we are going to refer to it as Aggregator and reader will mean the people reading the RSS feed.

Why do you need an Aggregator? Well, as briefly mentioned above, an RSS feed is a machine readable file, like an HTML web page. If you open a RSS feed using notepad, you will see it as unintelligible code. It has to be interpreted. So, the aggregator is really an interpreter like your Internet Browser is to HTML files.

Today's modern browsers have the capability of easily reading and subscribing to RSS feeds. But some people prefer to use an Aggregator because they are more feature rich. For example, they can combine two or more feeds and only display the content that contain certain key words.

Aggregators come in many forms. Most are desktop applications and freely available while some are not. Two examples are the [Sweetie Reader](#) and [Enterprising Mom Reader & Podcast Catcher](#). These two come pre-installed with a few Internet Marketing Favorites that you might find helpful.

Another type of aggregator is the web-based aggregator such as Bloglines, Newsgator and My Yahoo!

Here, I want you to go signup for one of these free aggregators or download one to your computer, install it and look for a feed or two to read. This is important because you need to see how RSS works in action and as a reader.

The following is my RSS feed. Add it to your aggregator and see how all this works from the reader's viewpoint.

<http://feeds.feedburner.com/TechBasedMarketing>

Click on this  to add to My Yahoo!

Click on this  to add to Newsgator

Click on this  to add to My MSN

Publishing To Other Websites

This is where the real power of RSS for marketers and web masters. Remember earlier we mentioned how web-based aggregators work behind the scenes to interpret an RSS feed? Well, that is the very same concept and technology used to publish an RSS feed to a regular website. A web master, using behind the scenes software, can easily get an RSS feed from anywhere on the Internet, and serve the content of the feed onto her web pages (do make sure you get permission to re-publish a feed).

Why do this? Why not just use Javascript? Simply because, search engines ignore Javascript; so any content contained inside the Javascript code are not valuable to your website as far as the search engines are concerned. With RSS, this content is converted in the background into HTML format and then displayed. This makes it totally search engine friendly and a casual website visitor won't even notice the difference. As if that isn't enough, whenever the RSS publisher updates his feed, the web master's page is updated automatically also - fresh content automatically! So whether you are the publisher or the web master, you'll benefit from it equally.

Why Use RSS

As briefly mentioned before, you might have guessed the biggest reasons why you should have a RSS feed are:

- To easily syndicate your content
- To get search engine readable link backs on every piece of news or article you publish - not just your bio. No matter if you publish entire articles or only excerpts of your article in your

RSS feed, your title always links back to your site. So people wanting to read the whole story or learn more will come to your site.

- To get fresh, targeted, search engine readable content automatically without doing anything. Busy web masters jostling to win search engine brownie points are always on the lookout for content and there's nothing that can top relevant content they can set and forget and don't have to worry about.
- To distribute news and information quickly to customers without having to deal with spam. Because the nature of RSS as a push technology, it puts the control into the customer's hands. They don't have to give you their highly protected email address in return for your content; they can read what they want when they want. There is a flip side to this and we'll discuss it later.

Overall RSS is a win-win-win situation but...

How to Apply To Your Business?

Plenty, if you are creative. Here are some ways you can use RSS.

- Deals, sales and specials especially those that are on a set schedule, i.e. weekly
- Company news
- Press releases
- Announcements
- Forum feeds
- Articles
- Tips
- Courses
- Q&A
- Job postings
- Monitor an event. e.g. if you're running a donation or trying to collect funds for any cause/event, you could update people on amount collected
- Reporting. This is most powerful and easiest to do using a blog. Going to or hosting an event? Post updates to what you learn, see, experience.
- To deliver content to your affiliates
- Allow affiliates to re-publish your content and get paid for it.

There's so much more you can do, you only need be creative. One thing to remember, most people subscribe to an RSS feed because they expect timely news, updated often; quite the opposite of email. So if you're going to create a feed, be motivated to keep it updated often.

Hot Tip

One of the main reasons people use RSS, is because it allows them to monitor only the information they are interested in. In email marketing, the customers are ALWAYS asking for customization, more relevant content. Many people don't know or totally ignore the fact you can create multiple

RSS feeds for one site. You can create one for each topic you cover, even each area of your website. In the RSS world, this is called channels. The idea is, if your feed is tightly niche, the higher your chances are of getting someone to subscribe. For example, create RSS channels for news, deals, forums, customer support and product improvements and so on. To see an example, visit http://www.techbasedmarketing.com/rss_feeds.html

How to Publish an RSS Feed

At the beginning of this report, I mentioned an RSS feed is made of a plain text file much like HTML. Now you learn how to create this file. There are several ways you can publish a feed, and how you do it depends a little on what you use it for.

Blogs

This is the most common, popular and easiest way to publish a feed. All blog applications out there will automatically create a feed file for you. There is nothing else for you to do but making your feed accessible and promote it.

By Hand

An RSS feed is plain mark up language and if you look at it in notepad you'll find many similarities with HTML, only, it has its own tags. If you have the time and inclination to learn and truly understand it, that's great because many RSS generators ignore a lot of settings and features that you could find useful. Just like knowing HTML has its benefits, you'll find an excellent tutorial in the [resource links](#).

Using Software

There are plenty of free software and online generators that'll help you publish a feed. Just enter "create RSS feed" in your favorite search engine and you'll find something immediately. Here are a few helpful tools:

- Using [Tristana Writer](#) - this is a desktop application for Windows that you download to create the feed manually. It also has a feature that'll scan a web page and create a feed.
- Using an [RSS Scraper](#) - this method takes an HTML page you already have and generates it into a feed. Quick simple and easy, no re-creating your content. You will however need to enter a few lines of code into your HTML file.
- Using [Stat2RSS Creator](#) - This is a desktop tool where you answer a few simple questions, hit a create button you'll receive an RSS feed to put on your site.

Making Your Feed Accessible

Once you published your feed, make sure you validate it. This is very important because if your feed doesn't validate, it won't show up at all in most aggregators and readers will find a nasty message like "cannot load", "invalid feed" or some unsavory description. So go to Feed Validator, enter the URL TO YOUR FEED and hit validate. If it doesn't validate, first try to check if you have

funny characters in your feed. Sometimes things like ‘&’ don't show up too well. [Feed Validator](#) will tell you where the problem lies.

If it validates, you can now promote your feed. There are two ways to do this. If you're doing it on your own, simply download a chicklet, RSS or XML image from wherever, we have one, [pick it up here](#). Upload the image to your web host and in your HTML file or wherever you place this, link the image to your feed. Here's an example code:

```
<a href="http://YOUR-FEED-URL"></a>
```

That's it! You're done! If you want it as a My Yahoo option, first you need to go to your My Yahoo! Account and enter your feed there. This submits your feed into the Yahoo! directory. Then, you'll need to format your link as follows:

```
<a href="http://add.my.yahoo.com/rss?url=YOUR-FEED-URL-HERE"></a>
```

Note: this method loads the Add to My Yahoo! image from Yahoo! servers. They may put a stop to this later on so it's best to just download that image and upload it to your web host.

The down side to doing the above, you don't have much statistics. You can look at server logs and see how many times your feed link has been loaded but that's pretty much it. If you want statistics you're highly encouraged to use [FeedBurner](#). On top of that they have really cool tools like a scrolling headline you can put just about anywhere even message boards!

HOT TIP!

Wait! You're not done yet. This is one thing few people realize or don't bother with at all. Many RSS aggregators and web browsers supports something called Auto Discovery. What does it do? Here's an example. When someone visits a web site that has Auto Discovery enabled, they don't have to go through all the copy and paste mumbo jumbo. They can subscribe with just one click.

The same way you put much thought and effort into making it easy for people to subscribe to your email newsletter, you should make it easy for people to subscribe to your RSS feed and that is to ensure you have auto discovery enabled. It's SO simple to enable. Open up the HTML file where you want to put the RSS feed. If you have a template that automatically updates across all pages, that's even better. In your header or between the <head></head>, enter this one simple line of code:

```
<link rel="alternate" type="application/rss+xml" title="RSS" href="URL TO YOUR RSS FEED"  
>
```

That's it! You're probably wondering – how do you know if it's working? Just visit your website in Internet Explorer or your favorite browser. If it works, you'll see the RSS icon in orange – see screen shot below. If not, it will be greyed out.



Where to Promote and Submit Your Feed

Now that you've got your feed going, it's time to promote. Put it in your email signatures, message boards, author's bio, everywhere and anywhere. You should also submit your feed to RSS directories and search engines. A good place to find a list of these directories is [Robin Good's Top 55 Premium Places to Submit](#). My friend Alice Seba also has got a [good list](#).

How to Display an RSS Feed For Web Masters

So... what do you do if you want to host or display other people's RSS feeds on your website? This requires a just little bit of technical know-how OR a willingness to learn - don't worry it's really not that difficult if you're using my [RSS Syndicator](#). Plus it has all the instructions and if you're not sure you can always contact me. Knowledge and motivation aside, one thing absolutely required is that your web host supports PHP and you can FTP into it. Don't know what PHP is? That's ok, just ask your web host if your hosting package has it. All you need to know is if you have it.

If your hosting account doesn't support PHP or allow FTP, there is a Javascript option but remember if you use Javascript, that information will not be search engine readable. So, if you're doing it for content and SEO purposes, don't bother using this. Upgrade your package or [get a host who will](#). If you merely want content for the benefit of your site visitors then get the [RSS to Javascript tool](#).

There are many easier ways to display RSS feed content on your website. Try [FeedBurner's BuzzBoost](#) or [Feed Digest](#) or, if you're using WordPress, you can simply use the build in sidebar widget or use one of the numerous [plugins](#) available.

Can I Replace My Email Newsletter with an RSS Feed?

This is a hotly debated question all over the Internet. My answer is, **not at the moment** and quite likely never. My belief is, email is easy and enjoys wider reach than RSS. Most people start off their online journey learning how to use email first. So if your market is less Internet savvy, email is still the best. If your audience is a little more advanced, then by all means offer RSS as well.

Many publishers/businesses are wary of RSS because they feel they cannot demand the attention of the reader since you don't get their email address, you don't really have a way of contacting the reader. The subscription process is somewhat invisible and totally anonymous. Once the reader unsubscribes, they are pretty much gone forever; there is no sorry-to-see-you-go-and-by-the-way page, you can't send them an email to ask for feedback or try to woo them back because you don't have that information. RSS also lacks really good tracking mechanisms at this point in time but that is changing even as I type.

On the other hand, having a huge list where a large chunk of it gets caught up in people's Junk box is frustrating. People also tend to forget they opted in for a particular newsletter and this is cause for spam accusations.

With the growing popularity of RSS fueled by the endless problems with email, more and more people are learning and opting for RSS. Your best bet, **offer both** RSS and email subscription. Not only will you allow more reader satisfaction but you'll also widen your reach.

What's that? Too much work you say? You don't have to do double work. Here are two free services that will build an RSS feed of your latest newsletter for free. All you need to do is include the email address they provide you into your list. Each time you mail out your newsletter, the service will receive that email and churn it into an RSS feed. Neat huh? If this is what you're looking for, check out [NewslettersbyRSS](#).

You can also do the reverse. Publishing your newsletters through an RSS feed. For example, if you have a blog, each time the blog is updated, your newsletter subscribers will also get an email with an excerpt of your post. To do this, I highly recommend [Aweber](#) - great for email newsletters as a whole.

Now That You Know...

It's important to put it all into action. If you're serious about getting your site indexed quickly, bringing natural traffic to your website and more, you should really consider getting this ebook, [Unleash The Marketing & Publishing Power of RSS](#).

Conclusion

By now I'm certain you're seeing the power of RSS and what it can do for your business or website. The best thing is, I'm only scratching the surface here. Although the technology isn't brand new, it's relatively young so, there's going to be a lot more effort and technological advancements in this area. Even as I write, so many services and software are being developed around RSS technology that will allow its use to be even more productive and meaningful and for marketers that is good news!

If you've found this document useful, feel free to pass it along, blog about it and offer it to your subscribers for download. I also have many more tips, ideas and actionable information how you

can leverage technology in your business. If that sounds great to you, head on over to TechBasedMarketing.com, and secure yourself a spot in the Marketing Technology Advisory mailing list. You'll also receive a 5 day e-course that teaches you in simple, every day English how to *improve your business process and productivity with technology* right now.

All the best,

Lynette Chandler

P.S.: Want to learn how to start blogging? Check out [this](#) comprehensive business blogging guide for beginners.

P.P.S: Got Questions for Lynette? [Click here to ask](#).